

# Teachers' Thinking about Home-School Relations in Low-Income Urban Communities

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## Abstract

Two studies examined teachers' perspectives on parent involvement in urban elementary schools serving low-income families. In the first study, second and fifth grade teachers were interviewed concerning their beliefs about and experiences with parents of children in their classrooms. Teachers discussed their ideas about family influences on children, strategies to involve parents, existing barriers, decision-making roles for parents, funds of knowledge available in the community to support children's education, and teachers' formal preparation for working with parents. Teachers thought that homework supervision and enrichment experiences at home were the most valuable form of parent involvement. Teachers had well-developed knowledge about barriers that parents encounter but they were unaware of community resources that might enhance the education of children. The vast majority of teachers reported receiving no preparation for working with parents. The second study describes teachers' responses to a summer workshop designed to engage them in thinking about and planning for parent involvement. Findings underscore the critical need for professional development including providing planning time and appropriate information for teachers about family and community issues.

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## Introduction

Two studies reported here focus on teacher thinking and learning about parent involvement in urban elementary schools serving low-income families. The first study examined teacher beliefs about parent involvement in five low-income urban communities. The second study describes the reactions of a group of teachers from one of these schools as they read, reflected about, and planned projects designed to enhance home-school relations. Two of these teachers were then followed as they attempted to implement their plans for parent participation during the following school year.

Schools, especially those in low-income communities, have been advised to promote parent participation. Research indicates that children whose parents are active participants in their education enjoy academic advantages compared to children whose parents are not (Bempechat, 1990; Snow, et al. 1991; Walberg, 1984). Involvement that contributes to children's school learning includes homework supervision (Miller & Kelley, 1991), attendance at school activities such as parent-teacher conferences (Stevenson & Baker, 1987), and communicating the importance and value of school work (Scott-Jones, 1995). Unfortunately, many low-income or minority parents experience barriers to participating in their children's schools (Calabrese, 1990; Lareau, 1989; Lightfoot, 1978; Leitch & Tangri, 1988).

Some identify cultural incongruity between home and school as an underlying factor deterring active participation by low-income parents in school affairs. According to scholars espousing this view, limited knowledge about the cultural background of children's families hampers the ability of teachers to establish partnerships with parents (Scott-Jones, 1993). Another potential barrier is alienation that the parents may feel toward school as an institution because of their own childhood experiences (Finders & Lewis, 1994) or because the climate of the school does not invite their involvement (Redding, 1997). Yet other barriers to participation include transportation problems or employment situations that do not allow parents to have time off to attend school functions (Espinoza, 1988; Leitch & Tangri, 1988).

## Study One

There is some evidence from exemplary programs that the barriers described above can be overcome and that productive and mutually satisfying home-school partnerships can be established (Comer, 1995; Moll & Greenberg, 1990). Most schools, however, do not have access to the intensive assistance and funding provided by the scholars involved in these exemplary programs. Instead, the task of promoting parent participation generally falls to teachers. Little research attention has been focused on teachers' ideas



about parent involvement. Some prior studies point to the leadership role that can be played by teachers and the importance of teacher practices in successfully engaging low-income minority parents (Becker & Epstein, 1982; Dauber & Epstein, 1993). It remains important to learn more about teachers' beliefs about parent involvement in order to develop school-family partnership programs. Accordingly, for study one, teachers were interviewed regarding their beliefs about parent involvement and their experiences with parents of the children in their classrooms.

Understanding what teachers believe is especially important in order to design effective professional development workshops about parent involvement. Teachers were asked to describe the kinds of parent involvement that they believed to be the most beneficial and the most detrimental for children's academic progress. Teachers are valuable informants because they have a unique and proximal vantage point from which to observe family participation and influence on children's schooling. Teachers also can inform us about the strategies they find effective and the barriers that they encounter in involving parents. It is particularly important to understand these barriers when planning programs.

Moll and Greenberg (1990) use the term "funds of knowledge" to refer to the skills and knowledge that are functional and valued within children's families and communities. Teachers who understand these funds of knowledge can utilize examples and topics within their curriculum and instruction that draw upon these existing family and community strengths. For example, fathers who work in construction hold knowledge and skills that contribute to the economy and welfare of the community and that relate to mathematics skills and concepts taught in elementary schools (Moll, 1997). It is unclear if teachers are familiar with the funds of knowledge within the school communities in which they work. In this study an effort was made to interview teachers of the same ethnic background as the majority of children and families served by each school in order to control for possible cross-cultural confounds.

Finally, teachers were asked whether they had any formal preparation for working with parents. Anecdotal evidence suggests that involving parents is a tacit responsibility undertaken by teachers with little systematic support. If teachers receive little education or staff development devoted to parent participation, then pre-service coursework and in-service opportunities may be needed.

## Method

### Participants

Schools with high enrollments of children from low-income families (greater than 50% participants in school lunch program) and with a majority of either Black, Hispanic, or White student populations were identified through university contacts with public schools. Six principals were approached and invited to participate in the study. Five principals agreed to ask the second and fifth grade teachers in their schools to participate in the interview. Of the sixteen eligible teachers, fourteen agreed to participate but only twelve interviews are reported here. Two interviews were not completed because the teachers were continually interrupted during the scheduled interviews by ongoing professional responsibilities. The interviews were conducted by the first author of this article. Currently, this author teaches in a college of education at a state university, but in the past she has worked as a parent educator and as a classroom teacher. She is interested in teacher education and in understanding how to promote home school relationships that will benefit children's development.

Table 1 displays characteristics of the participating schools and teachers. As noted in the table, two of the schools served predominately Black communities, two served predominately Hispanic communities, and one served a predominately non-Hispanic White community. Half of the teachers taught second grade and half taught fifth grade. Three of the schools were located in dense urban neighborhoods and two were located outside of the urban core but within a metropolitan area.

The teachers interviewed in the two schools attended by Black children were Black<sup>1</sup>. Similarly, the teachers interviewed in the school attended by mainly non-Hispanic White children from low-income families were non-Hispanic White. The teachers interviewed in one of the schools attended by mostly Hispanic children were Hispanic, while the teachers in the other school with a majority of Hispanic children were non-Hispanic White.

### Procedure and Data Source

Teachers responded to a semi-structured interview that took approximately one hour to complete. Items tapped teachers' ideas about: (a) beneficial and detrimental influences of families on children, (b) strategies teachers currently employ to involve parents, (c) decision-making roles of parents in schools, (d) barriers teachers encounter in working with parents of children in their classrooms, (e) "funds of knowledge" available among the parents and within the community served by the school, and (f) how teachers learned previously about working with parents. Interviews were conducted at the



Table 1.

## Characteristics of Participating Schools and Teachers

	<i>Schools</i>				
	1	2	3	4	5
<i>Percent of Students</i>					
Low-income	64.8	81.9	85.7	91.5	52
<i>Ethnicity</i>					
White	15.4	0.4	1.4	0	71
Black	11.1	99	34	100	7
Hispanic	72.8	0.5	64.5	0	18
Limited English Proficient	35.2	0	3	0	3
Student Mobility	38.9	33.8	30.7	43.3	40
Below Average Reading	36	65	68	47	48
Below Average Math	5	50	35	18	38
<i>Teacher Characteristics</i>					
<i>Teaching Experience (Years)</i>					
Second Grade	5	11	16/2*	24	4
Fifth Grade	15	23	3	20	13/14*
<i>Master's Degree or Above</i>					
Second Grade	No	No	No/No*	No	No
Fifth Grade	No	No	No	No	No/Yes*
<i>Ethnicity</i>					
Second Grade	W	B	H/H*	B	W
Fifth Grade	W	B	H	B	W/W*

*Note.* Ethnic designations: B = Black, W = Non-Hispanic White, H = Hispanic.

\*Two teachers interviewed in this school at this grade level.

respective schools during each teacher's available time, often before or after school. Ten interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Two teachers chose not to be audiotaped, so their responses were recorded in long hand, type-written later that day, and returned to them for endorsement as an accurate account of their statements.

## Results

Teachers' ideas about the forms of parent participation that contribute positively to children's education were examined and classified. Each teacher identified the three most important ways that parents were involved in their children's education. The most frequently mentioned beneficial form of parent involvement had to do with completion of assigned homework. Seventy-five percent of the teachers mentioned the importance of parental support in homework completion, including providing a place to do homework, checking homework, or helping with homework. Several of these teachers mentioned the importance of parents also helping to extend children's learning by reading at home and by taking the children to the public library. These teachers believed that the public library was a community resource that was underutilized by their students' families.

The second most important method of parent involvement identified by the teachers was communication between parents and teachers about the child. Interestingly, most of the teachers who mentioned this believed that parents should initiate and maintain communication with them about the child's progress and the school program. There was an underlying expectation that these communications would result from problems with the child. Several teachers said their "bottom-line" was for parents to at least listen to their side of the story when problems arose with a child, rather than judging them based solely on the child's version.

The third most beneficial form of parent involvement was parent involvement at the school. Fifty percent of the teachers believed that visiting or volunteering at school was important, but they all said that few parents were involved in this way. Some of the teachers said they had no parent volunteers. At most, one teacher said that fifteen percent of the parents volunteered at school.

Teachers identified the basic parenting children received at home as the fourth most important form of parent involvement. Thirty-three percent of the teachers believed this to be an essential contributor to the classroom climate and stressed the importance of parents training their children in socialization, that is, to behave appropriately and to cooperate with others. These teachers said that most parents did socialize their children adequately, but noted that the few children who were unsocialized, either through neglect or through poor example at home, tended to wreak havoc in their class-



rooms.

Finally, twenty-five percent of the teachers said that it was important for parents to provide for children's basic needs. They thought that parents who sent their children to school fed, clothed, and rested were equipping their children with the essentials. Each of the teachers who mentioned this said that most parents did provide for these basic needs, but experience with the few children whose parents did not highlighted the importance of this parenting function.

The forms of parent involvement that teachers identified as detrimental to the children's schooling were the converse of those practices that teachers believed to be beneficial – for example, not supervising homework completion, not communicating with the teacher, or not socializing the child to behave appropriately. One extremely detrimental example of a lack of basic parenting mentioned by several teachers was parents not ensuring that the child attended school regularly. A second grade teacher said, "There are parents that keep their kids out for a week," and a fifth grade teacher commented, "Letting them miss school is the worst, because even if they don't do the homework, they're going to learn something from being in a classroom. If they are not here, they're not going to get anything. I had eight out today. It is usually not so bad in here this year, but the teacher across the hall has 6 to 8 absent every day."

Teachers also described the strategies they employed to involve parents. Most teachers used written means such as notes and letters to communicate with parents. Several mentioned that placing telephone calls to parents posed a problem either because family telephones were sometimes disconnected or because parents were working away from home. Most teachers also mentioned school traditions associated with home-school relationships such as open houses, parent teacher conferences, and periodic report cards that parents signed and returned. They specifically mentioned trying to communicate classroom routines and policies at a fall open house. A few teachers talked about inviting parents to chaperone field trips, observe in the classroom, or volunteer at school. Unique strategies within this group of teachers included giving parents the teacher's home telephone number and sending weekly or biweekly reports attached to a packet of the children's work that the parents were required to sign and return to school.

Teachers were asked about the practice of including parents in decision-making roles. The teachers agreed that parents should participate in decision-making in a limited way. For example, teachers believed that parents should participate in deciding how to allocate funds, particularly discretionary funds. Only one teacher thought that parents should have a voice in curricular decisions. One teacher specifically mentioned that children should be assigned randomly to classrooms rather than by parent choice. When asked whether parents should be able to select or evaluate either their

child's teacher or new hires, the teachers uniformly disagreed.

Teachers identified some of the barriers that low-income parents faced in coming to school or being involved in children's education, but did not feel they could do much to alleviate these difficulties. Half of the teachers mentioned specific issues faced by working poor parents. They told about parents who worked multiple jobs, long hours, and nontraditional shifts in order to make ends meet. Several teachers recounted anecdotes about specific children. For example, one teacher said, "Just last week, I had a fifth grader who said, 'My mom got home late from work last night and left early before I woke up, so I couldn't have her sign this.'" One of the teachers summed up the dilemma parents faced in being involved at school succinctly, "Let's face it, it's just more important to bring food home." A third teacher mentioned the limitations faced by parents with restricted education. This was exemplified by a teacher who said, "I have had parents ask me how to do the homework from second grade, which just floors me." Only one of these teachers mentioned that parents may be frightened to come to school because of their own negative experiences in school. One-fourth of the teachers said that parents were not receptive or cooperative; it is interesting to note that two of these teachers taught in the same school. Finally, two teachers thought that some teachers were not open to parent participation and one talked about the increase in addiction evident among parents during the past twenty years.

Not one of the teachers could identify knowledge or skills held by any parents of children attending the school or by people in the community. In fact, teachers' responses to this question were typically greeted by a long silence and a hesitating "I don't know, I really don't know." Teachers were better able to identify the existence of values among parents in the community that might support education. Four of the five teachers who taught mostly Hispanic children noted that the families' affiliation with local churches was an asset. Two other teachers, one in the predominately non-Hispanic White and the other in a Black community, identified a work ethic among the children's parents, "I think that on a whole that our parents understand that you have to work for your money. Not a welfare mentality, and that's where our problem is—these parents are so busy making a living that the kids are forgotten or they're too tired, or whatever." Two other teachers noted parental efforts to keep the community safe for children. One described the formation of a parent patrol that supervised children's transition from school to home and back.

Ten of the twelve teachers reported that they had no formal preparation for working with parents. Rather, they had learned how to work with parents through on-the-job trial and error. Only one teacher took a class on parent involvement during her teacher education program. Another teacher reported having an in-service on the general topic of parents, but she could not



remember any details about it.

## Discussion

This study gathered information from teachers in low-income communities about their beliefs and practices regarding parent involvement. Little attention has been devoted to examining the perspective of teachers on this topic despite the extensive research that has been conducted on parent involvement in children's schooling. Based on their experiences, teachers identified parent support of homework completion, communication with the school, and involvement at the school as the most important forms of parent involvement. They also discussed strategies they use to involve parents and extant barriers to successful home-school partnerships.

Teachers believed that the most beneficial thing that parents could do for their children was to support student learning either through monitoring homework or providing enrichment. Reading and going to the library were mentioned specifically by the teachers as essential home activities. It is not surprising that homework and outside reading were important to the teachers, because practice is a key factor in learning skills, and because promoting student learning is their primary professional responsibility. It is important to note that some of the teachers recognized that the parents lacked educational skills necessary to assist their children, but the majority of teachers did not mention this as an issue during the interviews.

Although the teachers believed communication between home and school to be among the most beneficial practices for children, their comments tended to either explicitly or implicitly place the onus for initiating and maintaining this communication on the parents of students in their classrooms. Seen from the perspective of the teachers, who have the responsibility for numerous children (many with special academic or social-emotional needs), this is not very surprising. However, it does indicate that teachers may need to redefine their role and receive preparation and support for establishing and maintaining partnerships with parents.

The teachers in the present study received little or no preparation for working with parents during their teacher education program. More attention needs to be devoted to preparing teachers for this role during their professional preparation and through continued professional development. Both examples and experience are needed for adequate preparation.

There was also little institutional support evident in their descriptions; they did not have time, professional development, or resources allocated for parent involvement. For example, not one of the teachers who was interviewed had a telephone in the classroom. Greater institutional support backed by policy and resource allocation is likely to be a critical component to successful implementation of parent involvement programs.

Not surprisingly, teachers were acutely aware of some of the details of daily life that constituted barriers to more effective home school relationships. Several teachers did mention the competing demands that parents faced from working multiple jobs and/or from employment with nontraditional hours. According to government labor figures, these types of job arrangements are increasing and the greatest proportion of increase is among entry or low-skill level jobs (Jacobs, 1997; U.S. Dept. of Labor, 1995). This is a reality that has not yet been addressed by policies.

Teachers appeared to be unfamiliar with the alienation many low-income parents face when it comes to the schools that their children attend. Even though most teachers were of the same ethnic background as the students, they remembered their own families as more connected to the school, and most had not considered consciously the possibility that the parents of children in their classrooms may feel uncomfortable with them due to past negative school experiences (Finders & Lewis, 1994).

Perhaps the most significant finding for practice was that teachers seemed stymied by the question about what knowledge the families or communities might have that could contribute to the school children's education. This may indicate that the teachers held a deficit view of these families. It may also indicate that the teachers perceive academic skills and knowledge as separate from typical family activities. The evidence did not support the assumption that teachers from the same ethnic background as the families were able to apply their tacit cultural knowledge to parent involvement practices or to reflect the children's background in delivery of the school curriculum. Teachers who were from the same ethnic background as the families (several of whom grew up in the school neighborhood) did not transfer this knowledge to the school curriculum. This might be seen as another example of the difficulty many teachers experience in implementing the recent educational reforms that call for "authentic" or "situated" learning activities.

## Study Two

Based on the first study, it appeared that teachers might benefit by learning more about parents and by planning for parent involvement. Therefore, to address a school improvement plan and the limited preparation for working with parents that teachers had experienced during their teacher preparation programs, a summer workshop was developed for teachers in one of the schools. Study two examined change in teachers' thinking (Clark & Peterson, 1986) about parent participation as they engaged in an active learning situation involving planning to increase parent involvement.

We were particularly interested in identifying the type of information that promoted learning about parent perspectives and family involvement among



teachers. Teachers read, wrote journal entries, and discussed readings about (a) experiences, culture, and characteristics of urban families, (b) methods of involving parents, and (c) barriers to participation from the standpoint of parents. Reading selections included articles that addressed issues identified in study one, such as alienation experienced by low-income and minority parents.

Because teachers have little or no planning time during the school day in which to prepare for parent involvement, a central focus of the workshop was to develop implementation plans for increasing parent involvement in children's schooling. Two of the teachers were then followed as they implemented their plans. The experiences of these two teachers underscore some of the difficulties and benefits of enacting partnerships.

## Method

### Participants

Eight teachers, an administrator, and a parent council representative from a Chicago Public elementary school participated in a workshop, learning about and planning for increased parent involvement in the school. The parent, the administrator, and five teachers were Black, one teacher was Hispanic, and the remaining two participants were non-Hispanic White. Teacher's professional experience ranged from one to twenty years. All children attending the school were Black; 89% were from low-income families as determined by participation in the school lunch program.

### Procedures & Data Source

A school improvement committee of an urban school (a Chicago Public School) identified the need to improve home-school relations. Accordingly, a group (described above) met during the summer to read, reflect, discuss, and make plans for improving home-school relations. Readings described family life, parenting processes, funds of knowledge, home-school relations, and challenges of life in low-income urban communities (e.g. Calabrese, 1990; Heath, 1989; Moll & Greenberg, 1990), or provided descriptions and evaluations of successful family involvement practices in such communities (e.g. Comer, 1995; Shockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995).

Several sources of data were used to examine changes in teacher thinking. First, teachers kept journals in which they reflected on their experiences and responded to readings. Second, field notes documented issues raised and stances taken during group discussions. Finally, teachers' implementation plans and strategies were examined. Two of the teachers were interviewed

about implementation of these plans during the final month of the school year following the summer workshop.

## Results

Initially, teacher and administrator beliefs mirrored those of teachers in Study One. Teachers rated only 10 to 15 percent of the children's families (parents) as involved and the majority of parents as uninvolved with school. In addition, teachers expressed frustration with parents' limited response to their efforts to include parents. For example, in reference to the science fair the previous year, one said, "We worked hard preparing packets and workshops for parents and only 3 parents came. These parents simply don't care about education."

Teachers' journals indicated that their attitudes changed somewhat as they read, reflected, discussed and connected their experiences to theory and research. Several ideas proved to be particularly important. For example, the feelings of alienation and inadequacy low-income minority parents experience when interacting with schools surprised most of the teachers. One wrote, "I never realized the possibility that parents were afraid of schools or angry towards schooling because they had negative school experiences. I had never heard of such a thing. That just wasn't part of my own experience." Another wrote, "I hadn't really put that factor into my thoughts until I read this. I realized that the few parents that are involved in some way in my class are those that have comparatively high levels of education."

Overall, teachers attending the workshop expressed surprise that parents did not necessarily know how to help their children and may need guidance in how to do so. Research findings that parents want to help, but need more guidance in order to do so seemed to influence the teachers (Epstein, 1986; Shumow, 1998). One noted, "A lot of the time I tend to think that things are the way they were when I was in grade school. My parents always knew what to do." Another said, "I usually do simply tell parents their child 'needs help' and I've assumed they knew what to do."

The concept of "funds of knowledge" also made an impression, but only in conjunction with information shared by the parent participant. "The discussion with (the parent) was so enlightening. I tend to get discouraged about the resources that are available to my students, but during our discussion it made me think that even though they do not have the same resources that I had as a child, they have others within their community." A film of children learning a skill from an elderly individual also helped the teachers view the community as a potential educational resource.

Teachers' plans for practice mirrored the belief expressed by the teachers in the first study that homework was the most beneficial way for parents to be involved. Six of the eight teachers made specific plans to involve parents



at home with children's learning in a particular unit or subject area. For example, a second grade teacher, who was impacted dramatically by a research finding that even a small amount of time reading at home was related to reading achievement, planned to adapt a child-teacher-parent reading journal that was exemplified in another reading (Shockley, Michalove, & Allen, 1995). Two projects grew out of teacher's response to the "funds of knowledge" concept. A science teacher planned to recruit community members to help the students plan, establish, and experiment with school gardens. A first grade teacher planned to integrate reading, social studies, and parent involvement by engaging parents in creating "Now and Then Books" ("now"—the child's first grade experience & "then"—the parent's first grade experience).

The teacher who had planned the journal activity actually implemented several strategies to increase parent involvement. She "shared" her extended family and their talents with her students and parents, which was a warmly received endeavor. She also set up active learning stations in her classroom during report card pick-up days including "cases" borrowed from a museum that contained artifacts pertaining to curriculum and demonstrations/displays created by the children. Parents were overheard commenting to their children that they would have liked school if it had been like this when they had been school children. Several parents brought neighbors and relatives that they saw in the school hallway to the classroom to see the stations. Another popular activity that she implemented also involved a cooperative venture with a local museum. The parents responded enthusiastically to a late afternoon family field trip to the museum on a school bus. Most permission slips were returned within one day and an extra bus had to be scheduled to transport the families who signed up. Unfortunately, however, few families (only 2-3) participated in the reading journal exchange the teacher attempted to establish, which was very disappointing to her.

The teacher who planned the "now and then" books returned to school to find that she had more than thirty first grade students assigned to her classroom. According to the teacher, she expended all of her energy during the school year trying to provide basic reading instruction and to manage this classroom. An additional barrier for her was the high student mobility rate. Not only did she have a large number of students, but also the children changed frequently. For several months there were 35 children in her classroom; nearly half of them had not started school in her classroom. Unfortunately, she never implemented the planned "now and then" book project because she perceived it as an "extra" to the curriculum that she was required to teach and her energy needed to be focused on continually acclimating children to the classroom routines and keeping up with basic literacy activities.

## Discussion

The workshop proved valuable in addressing some barriers to parent participation. The teachers attending the workshop seemed legitimately surprised that parents could find them threatening. These teachers perceived themselves as altruistically motivated in their careers and had not considered that parents might not readily perceive them as such. This realization on the teachers' part was an important first step for them in their efforts to improve parent participation.

The teachers also realized that they might need to provide parents with some guidance when they wanted the parent to work with his or her child on academic skills at home. The way in which parents responded to opportunity to participate in enrichment experiences during the report card pickup activities and the museum trip exemplifies the value in planning and providing positive, fun, and educational opportunities for families. Given teachers' belief in the importance of the library in study one, it may be especially important for schools to form partnerships with public libraries in providing welcoming and positive experiences for low-income families. Like the museum trip, families may respond to activities that provide them with low-cost family entertainment.

Some barriers remained. Although reading about "funds of knowledge" and being exposed to examples associating family life with academic skills during the summer workshop helped the teachers to begin to think about the possibilities, the plans that the teachers made and carried out did not successfully utilize parents as potential contributors to classroom content. Successful incorporation of family background into the classroom curriculum probably requires direct and long term experience with families, accompanied by discussion and planning in a community of teachers, similar to what Moll and his colleagues (1997) designed for teachers. The summer workshop, when teachers did not have a classroom to draw upon, was probably not an ideal time to learn about "funds of knowledge." In any event, home visits, one method used to explore and tap parents' funds of knowledge, were not feasible in the community in which the school was located. Teachers feared conducting home visits and district policy did not endorse such practices. The idea of bringing parents to joint planning sessions at the school is a promising alternative and one that appeared to impact teachers' views.

Finally, the challenges that the first grade teacher encountered underscore the competing demands teachers experience. If parent participation is to be fostered by teachers, they will need to receive education for working with parents, as well as the resources, including time, to do so. Also, the serious student mobility problems need to be addressed at a broader policy level.



## Conclusions

Teacher beliefs and the learning evident as they focused on parent involvement underscore the critical importance of providing teachers with professional development about children's families and communities. Teachers need time, education and on-going institutional support to involve parents, learn about parent perspectives, and plan opportunities. Equally important, teachers need to understand the community as a potential educational resource rather than an obstacle.

## Footnote

- 1 The participating teachers preferred to be identified as "Black" rather than "African American."

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